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FACTS and STATEMENTS *illustrative of the TRADE of SUEZ, and of the COMMERCE of the RED SEA, as at present carried on.*
By G. F. DASSY, of Constantinople.

[MR. DASSY has been good enough to send to the Society a copy of a pamphlet by himself on the subjects stated above, dated and printed at Constantinople, in December, 1859.

The pamphlet is manifestly the production of a gentleman extremely well acquainted with the Red Sea Ports and their commerce, and in the present state of public questions relating to the East, the following extracts from the publication of a writer so well informed, will possess both interest and value.

The tables appended to the pamphlet are curious, but for them we cannot find space.—ED. S. J.]

The first extract relates to the Town and Port of Suez:—

“*Sueis* being built on the desert and being devoid of springs, raises for its own consumption nothing but a few sheep and goats, which find a scanty pasture on the scattered herbage of the neighbouring desert. A few fish, of which the quantity might be increased were the fishermen more skilful and encouraged in their calling, are procured from the sea.

“The bulk of the provisions for the inhabitants of the town who number about 6,000, is brought from the valley of the Nile, which is communicated with by camel routes debouching at Balbeis, Cairo, Basatin, Helwan, and other places as high as Beni-Suef. Cairo furnishes by far the greatest share of these provisions, which ought to be forthcoming in greater abundance now that the railway is at work. Good potable water* also, is procurable from Cairo. The Nile is the one type of abundance to an inhabitant of Sueis; and Cairo a more important Capital, in his eyes, than Constantinople, London, or Paris.

“There is a spot about eight miles from the south of the town of Sueis, on the eastern side of the gulf, and a mile and a half inland from the sea, called the ‘Oyùn Mûsa,’ or Moses Wells, from its being assumed to be the place where the Israelites first halted after passing the Red Sea. These springs, all overflowing, constant, thermal, and slightly brackish and sulphureous. Similar springs occur at other points on the same coast; and on the opposite coast, about twenty-five miles south of the latitude of the ‘Oyùn Mûsa,’ and in the Nile Valley at Helwan above mentioned.

“Within the last twenty years, the water of the Oyùn Mûsa has been turned to successful account for garden cultivation, with the result of a pretty green oasis, which offers a pleasant retreat to

* A distilling apparatus on a small scale, for distilling fresh from sea water, was used with success during the continuance, lately, of the British Hospital at Sueis.

the wealthier people of Sueis during the summer heats, and an increased stock of vegetable food for the townspeople all the year round. Great credit is due to MM. Costa, Levick, Kodsy, Manoula, and others, for their efforts in this direction.

"It is surprising that Sueis with its pleasant climate and accessories of sea air, and bathing, and inexpensive living, is not used as a watering place by the people of Cairo in preference to Alexandria, where the atmosphere is humid, and life is divested of the charm of its natural simplicity."

Mr. Dassy gives the following account of the mode of conducting the Trade of the Red Sea:—

"The mode of conducting the *Trade of the Red Sea* has probably undergone little change from the time when Solomon declaring all to be vanity, yet sent his fleets along its waters to traffic for gold, and pearls, and ivory, and ebony, and shittim wood, and male slaves, and female slaves, and eunuchs. Why these are the wares of trade that still traverse the sea and frequent its ports; and amidst the decline and fall of empires, and the instability of peoples, it is pleasant to contemplate a scene which has outlived history, and presents visibly to our faculties a piece of the world under its ancient and patriarchal conditions, where the language that was spoken by Job, and Agar, and Ishmael, and in which the prophet delivered the institutions of Islam, still lives. Steam, however, is pushing its inexorable way into these hitherto excluded regions, and unless nature be proof against art, bids fair soon to change the manner of their inhabitants, and to make the Arab, after he has withstood innovation for more than 4,000 years, acknowledge its power—a power that will attack him by reducing his isolation, and subdue his independence by multiplying his physical wants—with what result to his happiness the future will reveal; only he has no choice between courting the new agent of his destiny or being driven out of existence by it.

"The general trade of the Red Sea centres at *Geddeh*. It is most active there from *January to June*, which is called the season of the 'mosim' which may be translated 'mart.' The articles in which it chiefly consists will be indicated in future passages. Besides the things herein enumerated, must be mentioned Cloves, precious Stones, and Pearls, and a particular kind of marine wood obtained from the bottom of the sea, called by the Arabs 'yusr,' and by the Europeans, erroneously, black coral.

"The season of the mosim at *Geddeh*, is determined by the circumstance of the Winds being, at its commencement, favourable for the passage of vessels to *Geddeh* from the north of the sea, and from India and the south; and for their return at its termination; and is, therefore, probably of very ancient custom. The ships trading between *Geddeh* and India, Java and the eastern settlements, *still make but one voyage annually*. So that if Solomon sent his behests to *Geddeh*, as he would have done if *Geddeh* then formed the port of entrepôt, towards January or February, they would have been transmitted from *Geddeh* to eastern countries in August or Sep-

tember, and if of a nature to require delay for their execution in those countries, could only have been executed in time for the vessels returning to Geddeh in the February of the third year. At Geddeh the articles would have waited till October or November for southerly winds, and finally have reached Ezion-Gaber about three years after the orders had been despatched for them. The same course of trading, substituting Sueis for Ezion-Gaber, is still followed, though with the difference, in respect of time, due to the quicker navigation which now prevails. Merchants, residing in Jerusalem or Cairo, sending their orders for particular goods from the East through the ordinary commercial channels of Sueis and Geddeh, only receive them after the four distinct voyages mentioned, in one or two years, according as the goods ordered can be prepared in time for the first return voyage from the East or not.

“*Geddeh*, which is also the seaport of Mekkeh, contains a population of 30,000 souls, and is situated conveniently for trade, 650 geographical miles south of Sueis, and the same distance north of Bab-el-Mandeb. Mekkeh has a population of 40,000, increased during the time of the pilgrimage to 100,000 and more. It is distant from Geddeh, by donkey ten, and by dromedary seven hours; nearly due east.

“The Red Sea trade of Sueis is in a great measure correlative to that of Geddeh; the communication between Sueis and the chief markets in the sea, such as Hodeideh and Loheia on the Arabian coast, and Masawa and Suakin on the African, being through Geddeh. Boats sometimes make trips from Suakin to Sueis, and also between Yanb'u and Wuj and Sueis, but Yanb'u is in closer relation with Geddeh than with Sueis. The ports with which Sueis communicates regularly, are Moweileh, Tùr, and Koseir.”

The Vessels employed in the Red Sea Trade are described as follows:—

“The class of Vessels (*sambùk*, *pl. sanabik*) used in this trade vary in burden from 250 to 1,500 ardebs, that is, *from about 30 to 180 tons*. Their build, of which the origin must date back with the rest of things of the Red Sea, is very sharp forward, ‘with hollow entrance lines’ (about which so much discussion has been raised within the last few years in America and England), a clear run and upright stern. The even keel of these vessels is about three-fourths of their extreme length above, the remaining fourth being devoted to the entrance slope of the keel. The section of greatest beam is through the middle of the even keel, which is also the place for the mast, and the breadth of that section one-third of the length of the even keel. The outer, and only planking, is of teak, from Malabar. The vessels are rigged with fore and aft lateen sails, or, as such sails might be more properly called, Phœnician, Indian, or Arabian, or by other designation, indicating their having been used before the days of Latium. They are manned, in great part, with slaves. They sail well before the wind, but want flotation forwards, which renders them dangerous in a heavy sea. The masters (called, in the singular, *Reis* and *Nakhudá*) of these vessels are generally intelligent

and trustworthy. Their mode of navigating is to hug the shore, and anchor in shelter at nights: under this cramped system of navigation, many vessels are lost annually from want of sea room to leeward of the wind, which drives them to inevitable destruction on the coral reefs lining the shores of the sea.

"It is from the masters just described that the Red Sea pilots are obtained. These pilots, who know the sea very well, have been described as useless, because those who engage them do not know how to use them. It usually happens that nobody on board a European ship in the Red Sea can speak Arabic, which is the pilot's language, nor the pilot speak the language of the ship, and that, if the latter ventures to interfere in the navigation of the ship, under a sense of the responsibility of his supposed office, he is cut short in sea phrases which need not be cited. As well might Europeans complain that all Arab labour which does not come up to their European standard of excellence, is useless. Yet one can get a good dinner, with a little management, out of an Arab cook; and Arabs have made a very fair railway, under European management, through Egypt. These much-abused Red Sea Pilots can give a great deal of useful information, if allowed to do so in their own way, and if captains receiving it are able to appreciate it.

"The time of passage between Suez and Geddeh varies according to the season and direction of the winds. Thus, during the period of northerly winds, the boats run down from Suez to Geddeh in from *eight to fifteen days*; whereas to return against the same winds, they take as much as *sixty days*, and seldom less than *thirty days*. With the southerly winds the difficulty is reversed, and then boats make the passage quickly towards Suez, and are delayed in going towards Geddeh.

"The *Freights* by the boats are moderate, the usual charges being from 8 to 10 piastres, equivalent to from 13*d.* to 16*d.* sterling, per package weighing from 200 to 350 lbs.; 18 piastres, or 2*s.* 5*d.* per bale of about 350 lbs. weight of Manchester manufactures; and from one-sixth to a quarter per cent. for specie, which is given unreservedly, in sealed bags, into the charge of the reises of the boats, by whom such confidence is rarely abused. Passengers pay from 2 to 5 dollars between Suez and Geddeh, and find their own provisions. In the absence of a system of insurance, the merchants distribute their goods or specie among several boats, so as to guard against a whole consignment going at once, in the case of wreck, to the bottom."

The following statement is given as regards the magnitude of the Trade at Suez and Geddeh:—

"The chief circumstance that calls for explanation is, that the *Local Trade* of Suez with the Red Sea has been suffering from the date of the outbreak at Geddeh, in June, 1858, up to the present time, from a feeling of mistrust left in people's minds by the occurrence of such a catastrophe, and of uncertainty as to its ultimate consequences. The author has had this statement repeatedly made to him by merchants connected with Geddeh; and its confirmation,

he thinks, is deducible from the relative proportion of imports and exports shown in the tables.

"Thus the total value of *Exports from Sueis to Geddeh* (for the other ports may be taken as subordinate to Geddeh in the account), has been, for the first six months of the year 1859, 369,160*l.*, and of the *Imports* into Sueis from Geddeh, for the same period, 150,785*l.*, leaving a difference in value between the two amounts of 218,375*l.* against Geddeh. It, therefore, follows that in respect of the half year's trade, Geddeh became debtor to Sueis (that is, to Sueis and Cairo), for 218,375*l.* Allowing some portion of this sum to have been due to Geddeh on account of trade conducted before the commencement of the half year, and a further portion to have been liquidated by goods despatched from Geddeh after the conclusion of the half year, the author's inquiries still lead him to think that a balance, which he estimates at 150,000*l.*, remained against Geddeh. It is, however, within the knowledge of every merchant engaged in the Sueis and Geddeh trade, that before the outbreak, the money balance was always the other way, and that, quite independently of Government remittances and of the trade in specie, to be hereafter mentioned, about 1,500,000 dollars, equivalent to, say, 300,000*l.*, was actually transmitted in coin from Cairo and Sueis to Geddeh. Part of this sum would have been met by counter remittances of an incidental character in specie from Geddeh to Sueis, which, however, it is supposed, did not exceed in the aggregate 50,000*l.* a-year. These sums can only be gathered from opinion in consequence of its never having been the custom to register specie at the Red Sea Custom Houses. Deducting the 50,000*l.* last mentioned, from the 300,000*l.* annually remitted, we have a balance which used to exist against Sueis and Cairo, of 250,000*l.* a-year. Had the trade remained in its former state of activity, this balance would still exist, inasmuch as the numbers and wants of the people about the Red Sea have not increased, and the demands in Sueis and Cairo for Red Sea produce could only have been satisfied by sending the balance of payment as before in money.

"Hence the half of this last mentioned balance, or 125,000*l.* added to the precedingly mentioned 150,000*l.*, which together make 275,000*l.*, affords an approximative measure of the extent to which the trade between Sueis and Geddeh has suffered on account of the outbreak during the first six months of this year; and it is believed that the whole deficit in value of the trade during the year and a half which has now elapsed since the outbreak, has not been less than three times 275,000*l.*, or about 825,000*l.*, the profits on which, to the various traders engaged, would probably not have been less than 200,000*l.*

"In short, the tables seem to indicate that the trade, in the uncertainty of affairs following the outbreak, has been nearly reduced to supplying the inhabitants dependant on the markets of the sea with bare necessities in food, clothing, and metals, for which they have only been enabled to afford articles in very inadequate quantities in return, and been obliged to pay the balance in cash."

The effect upon the Trade of the large number of Pilgrims to Mecca, is referred to in the next extract:—

“The activity of the Geddeh market for four or five months in the year is much influenced by the number of *Pilgrims* resorting to Mekkeh. Their number varies from 40,000 to 60,000 a-year under ordinary circumstances, and sometimes even exceeds the latter number. The period of time allotted for the residence at Mekkeh is from the 27th of the Mohamedan month of Zu-l-Huggeh to the end of the succeeding month of Moharem. This period in the Christian year 1858, fell between *the 8th of August and the 10th of September*, or began about two months after the outbreak, and, in the present year, 1859, between the 28th of July and the 30th August. A large number of pilgrims, however, from over sea, arrive at Geddeh six months earlier than Moharem, in order that they may spend the month of fast, Ramadan, and the three months preceding, in the holy places. All the Pilgrims who can afford to trade, avail themselves of the opportunity which the pilgrimage offers for that purpose, and Ramadan, with its thirty days of fasting, but thirty nights of revelry, is proverbially a brisk month for business at Mekkeh and Geddeh. The sums which the pilgrims put into circulation for their maintenance and through their trade, while in the Hegaz, varies very considerably in the case of each person. Some subsist upon charity, while others may move or simply spend, if above trading, as much as 5,000*l.* All are made to pay dear for the accommodation and necessities they require, notwithstanding the holiness of their ostensible mission. The increase of trade due to the presence of the pilgrims cannot, it is presumed, be less, on an average, than 25*l.* a-head, which for 40,000 pilgrims, would make the annual value of the trade created by their presence 1,000,000*l.* This source of trade is of course under the relations subsisting between Geddeh and Sueis, not without its beneficial effect on the commerce of the latter port. The pilgrimage of 1858 was much interfered with by the outbreak, and owing to after apprehension of political consequences, that of 1859, it is affirmed, was reduced by one-half in numbers, and attended with a contracted trade and expenditure on the part of the pilgrims actually present. The reduced number of pilgrims is borne out by the number who passed through Sueis this year, as shown in Table III. Had there been no disturbing cause in operation, the number of passengers shipped from Sueis in the first half of the year might have been expected to reach 15,000. Here then we have had a further set of circumstances resulting from the outbreak which may be taken to account, so far as they go, for the diminution of the trade between Sueis and Geddeh for the past year and a half.”

The following passage relates to the Trade in Specie:—

“The *trade in Specie* between Sueis and Cairo and Geddeh, is, in a joint degree, consequent upon the merchants not using Bills of Exchange for adjusting their intercommercial transactions; upon the distribution of Gold coin at Geddeh and Mekkeh by the pilgrims;

upon the remittances in gold on account of the Sublime Porte for the use of the Government of the Hegaz and Holy Places; and upon the predilection manifested by the people of Arabia and of the Abyssinian provinces for *Silver dollars*. Where there are no foreign bills, there can be no question of foreign exchanges; and the relative value of gold and silver at Geddeh are determined by the relative quantities of coin of either metal at hand on the spot. Silver being, as mentioned, in most request for local circulation, the gold is usually cheap, and is re-exported as an article of trade to serve the purposes of a new set of pilgrims, or of new remittances by the Porte, or to be returned in goods from India, or in silver from Sueis. *The price of Gold in silver at Geddeh varies as much as 12 per cent.* In the spring of 1858, the exchange was one sovereign for $4\frac{1}{4}$ dollars, and towards the end of the same year for $4\frac{3}{4}$ dollars, being, at the latter rate one-eighth of a dollar, or nearly 3 per cent. under the value of the same coin, at the same time, at Cairo. The profits on the trade in specie, are said to be from 2 to 10 per cent. Of course, this profit accrues to those who have opportunities of collecting Gold at Geddeh and of exporting it, out of the pockets of those who have no other means of getting money there than carrying it thither."

The defective arrangements as regards Currency, of course fall heavily on the Turkish Government, as appears by the following passage:—

"The greatest sufferer by this primitive state of things in its territory is, as usual, the Government of the Sublime Porte, which may find a very fair measure, in Geddeh, of the sacrifices its neglect of the financial interest of the Empire entails on its Revenue. The Porte formerly remitted from Constantinople to Geddeh, for defraying the balance of expenses of its government of the Hegaz, about 123,000*l.* a-year. Since the outbreak, which has occasioned the necessity of additional troops and expenditure, the annual remittance to Geddeh, it is understood, has increased to 197,000*l.* a-year. This sum, with $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., commission, is paid by the Government at Constantinople, in instalments, to a contractor, on his producing the monthly receipts of the Hegaz Treasurer. The contractor pays the Turkish gold lira into the Hegaz treasury for $127\frac{1}{2}$ piastres, but receives it, or its equivalent, in silver, at Constantinople, for $112\frac{1}{2}$ piastres, by which arrangement the Porte, in effect, pays $13\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. in addition to the $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. commission, or in all, $14\frac{3}{4}$ per cent., amounting to 28,893*l.* for sending 197,000*l.* from Constantinople to Geddeh. As the repayments are supposed to be made to the contractor at Constantinople about four times a-year he does not require to use a capital exceeding 50,000*l.* for effecting the years' remittance, and will therefore net for himself and friends an annual profit from the Government of—allowing liberally for contractor's expenses—say, 25,000*l.*, out of this particular remittance: but that is not all, since delay in payment at Constantinople affords the contractor a good opportunity of getting rid of rice and other things in kind, in lieu of coin, for the use of the local government at Geddeh. The whole of the coin thus remitted to Geddeh passes

through Suez, and might be made available at its destination at an extreme annual cost of 3,000*l.* instead of 28,893*l.*”

We have in the next extract some curious facts illustrative of the practice of the effects of Hoarding Gold and Silver.

“We have dwelt upon *Silver Coin* finding its way through Suez to Geddeh, in the ordinary course of the Hegaz trade, at the rate of 1,250,000 dollars a-year, but said nothing of its *leaving* the Hegaz, Yemen, or Abyssinia again. The reader may be curious to know what becomes of it. A portion of it supplies the circulation of those parts. All accumulations, after fulfilling that purpose, are *Hoarded* by being buried in the earth, or closed up in walls. This practice prevails more particularly in Yemen, where every one, as soon as he has money to spare, establishes for himself a secret treasury, which he works out at night with his own hands, and reveals to no one until the approach of death warns him that the secret may be communicated to his worldly successor. It sometimes happens that death does not leave time for this important communication, and that treasures are lost to the friends of the deceased possessor, and found, in the course of “fate and destiny,” by strangers. The *great absorption* which *Hoarding* occasions may easily be conceived if we suppose a population giving 100,000 heads of families resorting to the practice and putting by 200 dollars a-piece, which would at once account for 20,000,000 of dead dollars. Many, it is true, will not possess 200 dollars; but, on the other hand, there are secret hoards of 3 and 400,000 dollars, the property of a single individual.

“The author would here pause for a moment to suggest whether there may not be in the preceding paragraphs something worth the attention of the Joint Stock Banks established in the Ottoman dominions? The great expense now attending remittances to the Red Sea, which are mostly managed through Geddeh; the stocks of coin capable of being drawn out; and the current opportunities for trade advances, would seem to indicate a practicable field for banking operations.”

The following passages give a summary of the extent and character of the Exports, Imports, and Shipping, and point out the countries most largely concerned.

“It is difficult to allot the portions of the Wool Trade recorded in the tables to the respective nationalities for account of which they are carried on.

“The inquiries made by the author with this object tended to show that directly or indirectly *British interests* here, as in all the trade of the East, are the largest concerned. A single reference to the tables will justify this inference. *British Cotton Manufactures* exported from Suez in the six months figure for 31½ of the 32 millions of Piastres representing that branch of trade, or for about *three-fifths* in value of the whole of the exports. The other articles which bear a British stamp are; *Cotton-twist* for 216,000 piastres, about half the *Woollen* cloth for 295,000 piastres; the *metals*,

excepting the tinned ware, for 1,860,000 piastres; half the *earthen-ware* for 142,000 piastres; and the machinery, which was for electric telegraph purposes, for 1,000,000 piastres; thus making for the British share in the *Export trade of Sueis* 35 millions out of a total of 54½ millions of piastres!

"The Power interested in the next degree in this trade is the *Sublime Porte*, which is represented by a long list of miscellaneous articles; among them figure the cotton and silk fabrics for 6½ millions; cereals, the produce of Egypt, for 5 millions of piastres, which include no part of the contributions in kind by the Egyptian Government for the support of the Holy Places; soap, from Palestine and Crete, for 544,000 piastres; oils, from the Turkish Islands and Egypt, for 450,000 piastres; dried fruits and olives for 112,000 piastres; seeds and herbs for 300,000 piastres; tobacco, from Syria and other Turkish provinces, for 456,000 piastres; with other items, which it were tedious to enumerate, for about 2¼ millions; making, for articles of *Turkish origin*, a total of about 15½ millions of piastres of *Exports*. The remaining 3½ millions of exports may be divided between Austria, France, Italy and Morocco. As Italian productions we have sulphur and red coral together for 878,000 piastres, and from Venice the well-known glass beads for 125,000 piastres. Articles of United States origin, which I would fain have been able to cite, do not yet appear as exports from this end of the Red Sea. Besides the interests concerned in respect of the origin of the articles here enumerated, there are involved the other interests of the traders between Sueis and Geddeh, and of the Shipping in which the goods are carried.

"The distribution of the Shipping appears in the tables. The trading interests at Cairo and Sueis include a large proportion of Ottoman, then British, French, Greek, Belgian. After the Ottoman Mahommedan subjects, the Greeks, true to their history of 2,500 years, and to their part in this particular commerce, from the time of the Ptolemies, are at this day also the most active agents in conducting it.

"Of the *Articles Imported* into Sueis, specified in the tables, *Turkish territory* may be said to produce bees-wax, 344,000 p.; coffee, 11,800,000 p.; fibre, for sewing sacks, 29,000 p.; doom nuts, 7,000 p.; doom fibre (*lif*), 38,700 p.; gum arabic, 206,000 p.; leathern water bottles, 29,400 p.; mother-of-pearl shells, 637,400 p.; rhinoceros horns, 14,300 p.; sack (from yemen), 360,000 p.; raw hides, 510,000 p.; fish skins, 5,000 p.; tortoiseshell, 344,000 p.; tamarind paste, henna and senna, 236,009 p.; and, say one-half, of the item of miscellaneous, 28,000 p.; making altogether for Imported produce of Turkish origin, 14,934,000 piastres.

"The *British* element, as regards place of origin, takes the next rank, and comprises, China preserves (from Hong-Kong and Singapore), 55,000 p.; cotton and mixed goods from India, 1,071,000 p.; Chinese crockeryware, 18,000 p.; turmeric (India), 178,000 p.; essential oils (ditto), 90,000 p.; pepper (ditto), 844,000 p.; rice (ditto), 5,000 p.; cashmere shawls (ditto), 21,000 p.; spices (ditto, and Ceylon), 661,000 p.; sugar, 8,000 p.; tanned skins (Surat), 8,500 p.; and, say one-third, of the item of miscellaneous, 19,000 p.;

which give a total value of imports of British origin into Sueis, of 4,198,000 p.

"*Persia* takes the next place, and sends assafœtida, 17,000 p.; almonds, 53,000 p.; carpets, 36,000 p.; tobacco, 1,126,000 p.; and some further items which make up Persian produce to about 1,500,000 p. The coast of Africa, outside the straits, yields incense 1,169,000 p.; myrrh, 17,000 p.; and say, 50,000 p. of produce which cannot be discriminated, which gives a total for the African produce, of 1,236,000 p. The several totals arrived at account for 21,867,000 p. out of the whole 22,316,120 p. of imports contained in Table II. Of the balance, Banca tin absorbs 268,000 p., which only leaves 200,000 p. undetermined."
